

Europäisches Patentamt  
European Patent Office  
Office européen des brevets



(11) **EP 1 095 820 A1**

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:  
02.05.2001 Bulletin 2001/18

(51) Int Cl.7: **B60R 9/06, B60R 9/10**

(21) Application number: **99850157.1**

(22) Date of filing: **25.10.1999**

(84) Designated Contracting States:  
**AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU  
MC NL PT SE**  
Designated Extension States:  
**AL LT LV MK RO SI**

(72) Inventor: **Pesch, Michael**  
**74532 Ilshofen-Eckarthausen (DE)**

(74) Representative: **Andersson, Per-Rune**  
**Albåhns Göteborg AB**  
**Box 142**  
**401 22 Göteborg (SE)**

(71) Applicant: **Industri AB Thule**  
**S-330 33 Hillerstorp (SE)**

(54) **Cargo carrier**

(57) The present invention concerns a cargo or bicycle carrier (1), the carrier, when in use, being arranged on and supported by a towbar (19,20), mounted on the car (2), and which carrier comprises a support platform (3) or the like for the bicycles, a clamping device (18) attached to the platform for clamping the platform to a towbar ball (20), the clamping device comprising two clamping members (28,29), having each a ball cup (32,38), designed to partly fit against the respective of two mainly opposite parts of the towbar ball (20), one of the clamping members (29) being movably arranged in the clamping device (18), and a locking member (44,42), pivotably arranged to, when actuated, force the movably arranged clamping member (29) towards the other clamping member (28) in order to clamp the towbar ball (20). The invention is that the locking member (41,42) is pivotable around a locking member axis (24) and comprises an actuating part (41), protruding from the locking member axis (24) and having a cam surface (43), facing the movably arranged clamping member (29), and a lever (42), attached to the actuating part (41), for pivoting the actuating part around the locking member axis (24) to either of an end locking position or a position away therefrom, that the movably arranged clamping member (29) has a supporting member (33), which is carrying the ball cup (38) and is extending from and pivotably arranged with a clamping member axis (34), spaced from the ball cup (38), that the supporting member has a sliding surface (44), facing the actuating part cam (41), whereby the sliding surface (44) and the actuating part cam surface (43) are arranged to cooperate in pivoting the movably arranged clamping member (29) around its axis (34) from a loose hanging position towards the other clamping member (28) to a clamping position where the ball cups (32,38) are clamping the ball (20) under tension, and that the sliding surface

(44), the actuating part cam surface (43) and the lever (42) are arranged in the way that the actuating part cam surface (43) is near or at a position where the sliding surface normal (44n) through the contact point between the sliding and cam surfaces (44 and 43) intersects the locking member axis (24), i.e. at a locking position, when the lever (42) is at its end locking position.

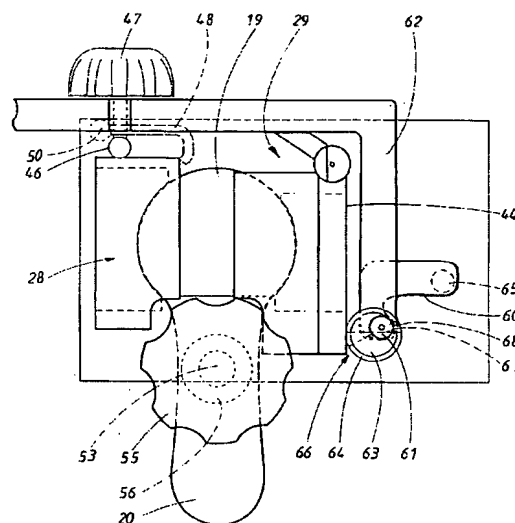


FIG. 8

EP 1 095 820 A1

## Description

### TECHNICAL FIELD

**[0001]** The present invention relates to an auxiliary cargo carrier for motorcars, especially a bicycle carrier, the carrier, when in use, being arranged on and supported by a towbar of the type comprising a ball, mounted on the car, and which carrier comprises a support platform or the like for the cargo, a clamping device attached to the platform for clamping the platform to the towbar ball, the clamping device comprising two clamping members, having each a ball cup, designed to partly fit against the respective of two mainly opposite parts of the towbar ball, one of the clamping members being movably arranged in the clamping device, and a locking member, pivotably arranged to, when actuated, press the movably arranged clamping member towards the other clamping member in order to clamp the towbar ball.

### BACKGROUND ART

**[0002]** Cargo carriers for cars supported by a towbar ball are well known, e.g. the THULE bicycle carrier 989. This carrier comprises a clamping device with one movable and one fixed clamping member. The movably arranged clamping member is put under tension by a tensioning lever, which is carrying an actuating bolt, protruding from the lever base a bit separated from a lever axis. The force acting on the movably mounted clamping member is linearly depending on the force acting on the lever end, which is manually displaced. The tension thus achieved is large enough to secure that the carrier clamping device does not leave the ball, and it is also normally large enough to safely keep the carrier from turning with the ball as a center. As an additional precautionary measure, the carrier is equipped with a fork-like securing device, which connects to the towbar stem, protruding from the vehicle. However, many modern cars and car bumpers are designed differently from older cars, and the consequence of this is that the towbar stem, holding the towbar ball is protruding almost upright from the car, thus making it hard to find a good connection with a simple securing device, forking the stem.

### DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

**[0003]** The present invention is eliminating the need of towbar supported cargo holder to have an additional securing device, clamping the towbar stem. In the new cargo carrier therefore the locking member is pivotable around a locking member axis and comprises an actuating part, protruding from the locking member axis and having a cam surface, facing the movably arranged clamping member, and a lever, attached to the actuating part, for pivoting the actuating part around the locking member axis between an end locking position and a po-

sition away therefrom. The movably arranged clamping member has a supporting member, which is carrying the ball cup and is extending from and pivotably arranged with a clamping member axis, spaced from the ball cup, and the supporting member has a sliding surface, facing the actuating part cam, whereby the sliding surface and the actuating part cam surface are arranged to cooperate in pivoting the movably arranged clamping member around its axis from a loose hanging position towards the other clamping member to a clamping position where the ball cups are clamping the ball under tension. The sliding surface, the actuating part cam surface and the lever are arranged in the way that the actuating part cam is near or at a position where the sliding surface normal through the contact point between the sliding and cam surfaces crosses the locking member axis, i. e. locking position, when the lever is at its end locking position. With this design the clamping force or tension from the two clamping members at the towbar ball can be large enough to safely hold the cargo carrier without the need of an additional fork-like device, holding the towbar stem.

**[0004]** Preferably the cargo carrier is designed in the way that the normal through the contact point is past the actuating part axis when the lever is in its end locking position. This gives a self-locking function which helps the user to fix the carrier to the car.

**[0005]** An even more advantageous carrier according to the invention has an actuating part that comprises a step surface, which is arranged to engage the sliding surface when the movable clamping member is in a semiopen position. This helps when determining the position to fix the carrier and when loading the carrier.

**[0006]** If the normal from the sliding surface at the contact point between the step surface and the sliding surface is past the locking member axis, seen from the lever side, the locking member has a stable semi-open position which helps even more.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

**[0007]** In the following the invention will be described with reference to the drawings, on which

Fig. 1 shows a bicycle carrier, including the invention, on a schematic car,

Fig. 2 shows part of the carrier with the clamping device in a perspective view,

Fig. 3 shows the clamping device opened from the back with the locking member in a semi-open position,

Fig. 4 shows the clamping device as in fig. 3 but with the locking member in a locked position,

Fig. 5 shows in a perspective view the clamping device in a locking position,

Fig. 6 shows in a perspective view the clamping device in the semi-open position,

Fig. 7 shows the clamping device with the towbar

stem coming from the car to the right and

Fig. 8 shows an alternative embodiment of the invention, which alternative concerns the actuating part.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

**[0008]** As can be seen in fig. 1, a bicycle carrier 1 is shown, attached to a schematically shown car 2, as a good example of the use of the invention. The bicycle carrier comprises a platform 3 which is made of iron or steel bands and which is of a well known kind and shall therefore not be described in great detail here. Nevertheless, the platform 3 comprises one left and one right wing 4,5, which each holds one taillight 6,7. The taillights are complementary, in many countries a statutory provision, as the ones on the car are easily hidden behind the cargo, and for the same reasons a licence plate holder 8 for an extra licens plate is provided. The platform is built for two bicycles, as can be seen from the two wheel ditches 9,10 and 11,12 on the wings 4,5 respectively. Raising from the platform is a U-shaped retaining bar 13 with one short 14 and one long 15 bicycle holder for the inner and outer bicycle respectively. The holders also are of a well known type and need not to be described in detail. An electric cabling 16 with a connector 17 for the lights is also furnished.

**[0009]** Attached to the platform is a clamping device 18. The clamping device 18 is shown and described in relation to figures 2-7.

**[0010]** The clamping device 18 is shown from the car side in fig. 2 together with the middle part of the platform 3, located between the wings 4 and 5, to which middle part the clamping device is attached, and with a towbar ball 19 on a towbar stem 20 in order to show the position for use. The clamping device has a three-sided, mainly rectangular housing 21 with vertically arranged walls, consisting of rigid sheet metal. The open wall is arranged to the side, seen in relation to a longitudinal direction of the platform, as attached to a car. Across the opening at the open wall, between the adjacent walls 22,23, a locking member axis 24 is arranged. The axis is pivotably supported in axis openings 25,26 in the walls 22,23 and mainly parallel to the longitudinal direction of the platform.

**[0011]** In the housing, a first and a second clamping member 28 and 29 are arranged. The first clamping member 28 comprises a first holding member 31, which is attached, e.g. by welding, to the joining wall 30, and a first ball cup 32, contained in the holding member 31 and shaped to fit at part of the ball 19. The second clamping member 29 comprises a second supporting member 33, which is attached to a supporting member axis 34, which in turn is pivotably arranged at the upper part of the side walls 22,23 in parallel of axis 24, in holes 35 and 36 respectively. Further, the second clamping member comprises a holding member 37 with a second ball cup 38, both attached to the second supporting

member (see fig. 3), also shaped to fit part of the ball 19. The ball cups 32 and 38 are made from steel or a steel alloy. It is advantageous if the inner diameter of the cups is somewhat smaller than the diameter of the ball. In that case the clamping grip on the ball from the cups will be improved, compared to equal diameters, as the grip will be enhanced at the rim of the cups, which gives a good torque. As an example can be mentioned that if the ball has a diameter of 50 mm, the cups can have 49,6 mm.

**[0012]** From each of the holes 35 and 36 an entering channel 39 and 40 are inclining to the upper rim of wall 22 and 23, respectively for the entering at the supporting member axis 34. The height of the channel is a little smaller than the diameter of the supporting member axis, and to still allow for entering, the endings of the axis 34 are partly cut, along the axis, so that the axis can enter with the supporting member taking a certain angle relatively to the housing 21. After entering, the supporting member is pivoted slightly, and then it's effective diameter in relation to the entering channel is big enough to retain the axis in position.

**[0013]** The axis 24 supports at its middle part an actuating part 41, protruding from the axis (see fig. 3 and 4) in a direction towards the second supporting member 29. Integrated with the actuating part 41 is a tensioning lever 42, reaching from the actuating part upwards over the height of the housing 21 and the platform level and from there bent about at a right angle to be able to mainly level with the platform 3 as shall be described in the further text.

**[0014]** At the outer end, the actuating part comprises a rounded cam surface 43. The second supporting member comprises, on the side that faces the actuating member, a sliding surface 44. The cam surface 43 and sliding surface 44 are arranged to cooperate as the actuating part with the aid of the tensioning lever is pivoted around the locking member axis 24 in the following way.

**[0015]** At the start (see fig. 3 and 6), the supporting member is hanging loose from its axis holes 35,36 and the cam surface 43 during pivoting counterclockwise around locking member axis 24 approaches and contacts the sliding surface 44. After contact is made and the actuating part continues to pivot around it's axis 24, the supporting member 33 is forced to pivot around it's axis 34 and close the gap around the ball 19. The clamping device 18 is designed in the way that the gap is closed and a strong tension in the different members of the device is created, just before the actuating part reaches it's largest effective length, i.e. just before the normal of the sliding surface at the contact point crosses the center of the locking member axis 24. If then via manouvring of the tensioning lever the actuating part is forced further, the tension passes it's maximum and then the said normal passes the center of axis 24 (see fig. 4) just a little, until the tensioning lever 42 reaches an end position, countering the upper rim of wall 30 of the housing 21 and levelling with the platform. Thus a

self-locking effect is achieved.

**[0016]** As can be seen in fig. 3 and 4, the actuating part comprises a knee 45 below the cam surface. The knee 45 is designed to stabilize the tensioning lever and the actuating part in a semi-open position, as can be seen in fig 3. This is very useful when the carrier shall be adjusted to fit accurately on the towbar ball. The portion of the actuating part between the knee 45 and the cam surface 43 then take a stable stand against the sliding surface 44.

**[0017]** To secure the tensioning lever 42 rigidly, the lever comprises a T-ended, threaded screw 46, a tightening knob 47, fitting the threads of the screw 46, and a claw member 48, pivotably attached to the housing 21. The T-ended screw 46 is positioned with its T-end underneath the lever and the knob 47 is threaded onto the screw on the upper side. The screw is passing through a hole 49 in the lever, which hole is larger than necessary for the screw to pass, so that the screw can take different angles in the hole. This is necessary in order for the user to be able to manipulate the screw to grip under the outer, hooked end of the claw 48. As can be seen in fig. 3, the claw 48 and the screw 46 with the knob 47 holds the lever safely in its semi-open position.

**[0018]** When the lever is in its locked position (see fig. 4 and 5), the claw member 48 is tilted downwards and the T-ended screw is then tightened, with the knob 47, to the claw at a position closer to the pivoting center of the claw 48, compared to its position when the lever 42 is in its semi-open position.

**[0019]** In fig. 6 it can be seen that the claw 48 is attached to the wall 30 with the aid of a hollow tube 49, welded to the wall, and a claw axis 50, reaching through the tube 49 and two surrounding, fastening ears 51, shaped at the claw end.

**[0020]** At the wall 22, the rear wall of the housing 21, seen from the car, a supporting adjuster 52 is arranged. The adjuster 52 comprises a threaded member 53, which is arranged in a correspondingly threaded hole 54 in the wall 22. At the outside of the threaded member a turning wheel 55 is fastened, and at the inside a thrust piece 56, which is freely rotatable around the threaded member 53.

**[0021]** The function of the supporting adjuster 52 is to support the cargo carrier when it is adjusted in its optimal position on the towbar and to secure it at the right tilting angle when loading and unloading the cargo, i.e. the bicycles. During this process the thrust piece 56 is brought into contact with the towbar stem, just under the ball, via manipulating of the turning wheel 55.

**[0022]** In fig. 7 the clamping device 18 is shown from the open side of the housing 21 with the tensioning lever 42 in the closed position. Some parts like the locking member axis have been omitted to get a better view of the supporting adjuster 52. The supporting adjuster is also used for tilting the device in a controllable manner when i.e. the luggage compartment has to be opened.

**[0023]** In fig. 8 an alternative embodiment of the in-

vention with a differently designed actuating part is shown. The walls 22 and 23 of the housing 21 in this embodiment has each an L-shaped opening 60 for a modified locking member axis 61. At the middle of the locking member axis 61 is arranged the tensioning lever 62, and on both sides of the lever 62 each an excenter 63, which is non-rotatable vis-a-vis the locking member axis 61. Circumfering the each of the excenters 63, which have a circular circumference, are two cylindrical shells 64. The shells 64 are substitutable, although their clearance to the excenters is very tight. The reason for the shells to be substitutable is that the effective height of the excenters can be modified by changing between shells of different thickness to compensate for component tolerances and wear.

**[0024]** The locking member axis 61 is positioned with its ends in the L-shaped openings 60. When the cargo carrier is attached to the tow bar and the clamping device 18 shall enter the ball 19, the movable clamping member 29 must be able to open, i.e. swing freely in a direction corresponding to the right in fig. 8. In order to free the clamping member 29 the locking member axis 61 is then manually manipulated to the right of the L-shaped opening 60 to a position marked 65 in fig. 8. This gives space enough for the clamping member 29. When the clamping shall take place, the locking member axis is manipulated to the position 61, near the "toe" of the L-shaped openings. In order to retain the locking member axis in position during locking operation, the toe of the L-shaped openings have a recess 68, positioned in the counter-tensioning direction. Then the tensioning lever 62 is brought into the locking position and the T-ended screw 46 is tightened by the knob 47. The top 66 of the excenters are so positioned on the locking member axis that according to the invention the normal 67 from the sliding surface 44 through the contact point between the excenters and the sliding surface is passed beyond the centre of the locking member axis 61 to have a self locking effect. It is possible to allow the cylindrical shells to rotate during locking operation.

**[0025]** The above described and disclosed embodiment of the invention should not in any way limit the scope of the invention; the full scope is defined through the following claims. As an example the mounting of the movable clamping member can be designed with a non-detachable axis arrangement. Also the securing mechanism for the tensioning lever can be designed differently, the simplest locking device being a strap. Also the cam surface and the sliding surface arrangement does not necessarily have to reach the self-locking position; the main thing is that the mechanism can achieve the force necessary to safely secure the clamping device to the ball, and that is achieved when the actuating part approaches its maximum length. Also the cups 32 and 38 can be designed to very closely but not in contact with circumference the towbar stem, when the clamping device is in its locking mode. This gives an extra stability to the cargo carrier on the car. One side of the stem must

be left cleared though, the one facing rearwards from the towbar, as the tilting ability is still wanted.

#### Claims

1. Auxiliary cargo carrier for motorcars, especially a bicycle carrier (1), the carrier, when in use, being arranged on and supported by a towbar (19,20), mounted on the car (2), and which carrier comprises a support platform (3) or the like for the cargo, a clamping device (18) attached to the platform for clamping the platform to a towbar ball (20), the clamping device comprising two clamping members (28,29), having each a ball cup (32,38), designed to partly fit against the respective of two mainly opposite parts of the towbar ball (20), one of the clamping members (29) being movably arranged in the clamping device (18), and a locking member (41,42), pivotably arranged to, when actuated, force the movably arranged clamping member (29) towards the other clamping member (28) in order to clamp the towbar ball (20), **characterised in** that the locking member (41,42) is pivotable around a locking member axis (24) and comprises an actuating part (41), protruding from the locking member axis (24) and having a cam surface (43), facing the movably arranged clamping member (29), and a lever (42), attached to the actuating part (41), for pivoting the actuating part around the locking member axis (24) to either of an end locking position or a position away therefrom, that the movably arranged clamping member (29) has a supporting member (33), which is carrying the ball cup (38) and is extending from and pivotably arranged with a clamping member axis (34), spaced from the ball cup (38), that the supporting member has a sliding surface (44), facing the actuating part cam (41), whereby the sliding surface (44) and the actuating part cam surface (43) are arranged to cooperate in pivoting the movably arranged clamping member (29) around its axis (34) from a loose hanging position towards the other clamping member (28) to a clamping position where the ball cups (32,38) are clamping the ball (20) under tension, and that the sliding surface (44), the actuating part cam surface (43) and the lever (42) are arranged in the way that the actuating part cam surface (43) is near or at a position where the sliding surface normal (44n) through the contact point between the sliding and cam surfaces (44 and 43) intersects the locking member axis (24), i.e. at a locking position, when the lever (42) is at its end locking position.
2. Auxiliary cargo carrier according to claim 1, **characterized in** that the normal (44n) through the contact point is past the actuating part axis (24) when the lever (42) is in its end locking position.

3. Auxiliary cargo carrier according to claim 1 or 2, **characterized in** that the actuating part (41) comprises a knee (45), which is arranged to engage the sliding surface (44) when the movable clamping member (29) is in a semi-open position.
4. Auxiliary cargo carrier according to claim 3, **characterized in** that the normal (44n) from the sliding surface (44) at the contact point between the knee (45) and the sliding surface (44) is past the locking member axis (24), seen from the lever (42) side.
5. Auxiliary cargo carrier according to claim 1 or 2, **characterized in** that the actuating part, protruding from the locking member axis (61), comprises at least one excenter part (63), non-rotatably arranged on the locking member axis having a circular circumference.
6. Auxiliary cargo carrier according to claim 5, **characterized in** that the excenter part (63) is tightly circumfered by a substitutable, cylindrical shell (64).

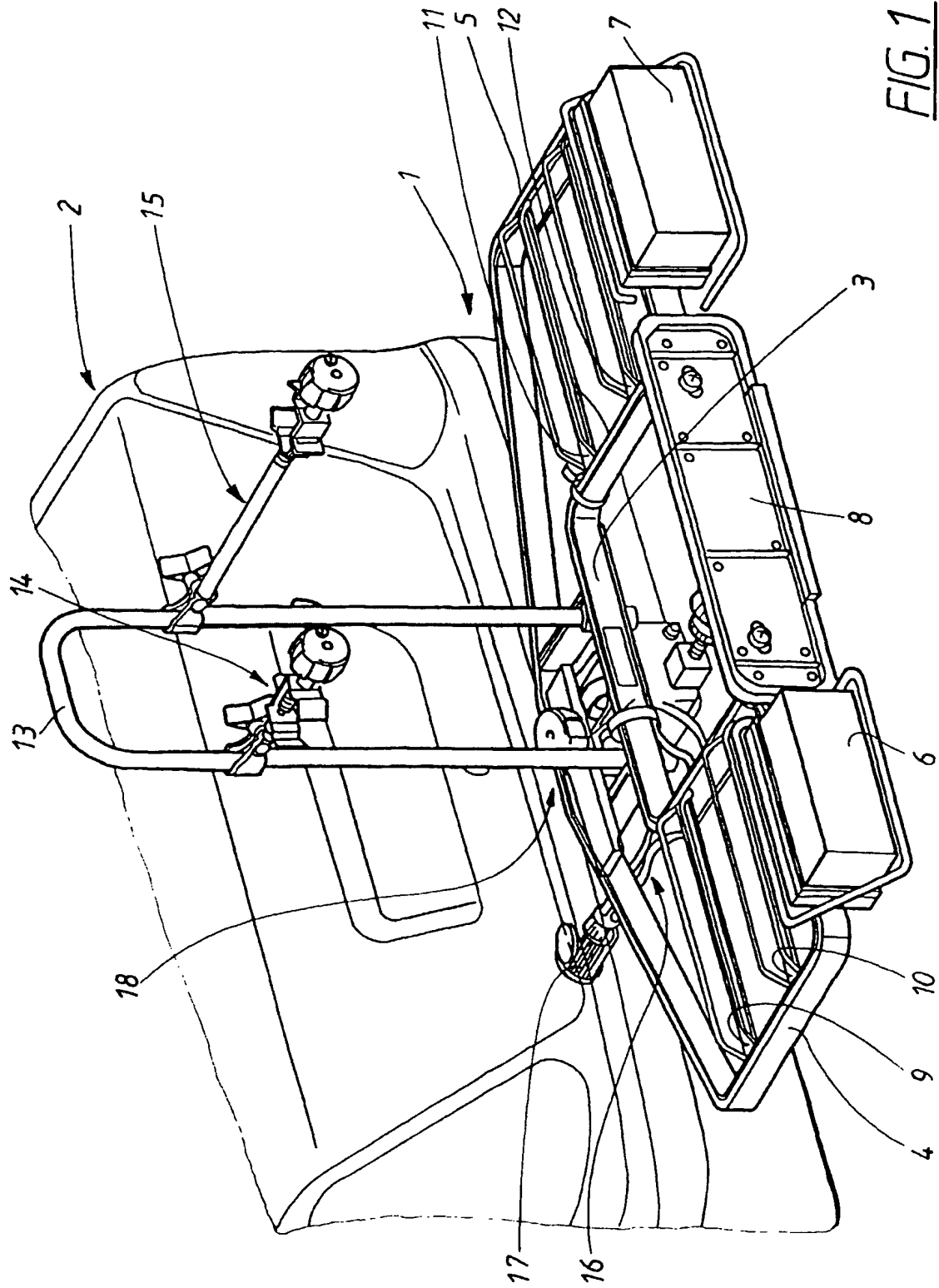


FIG. 1

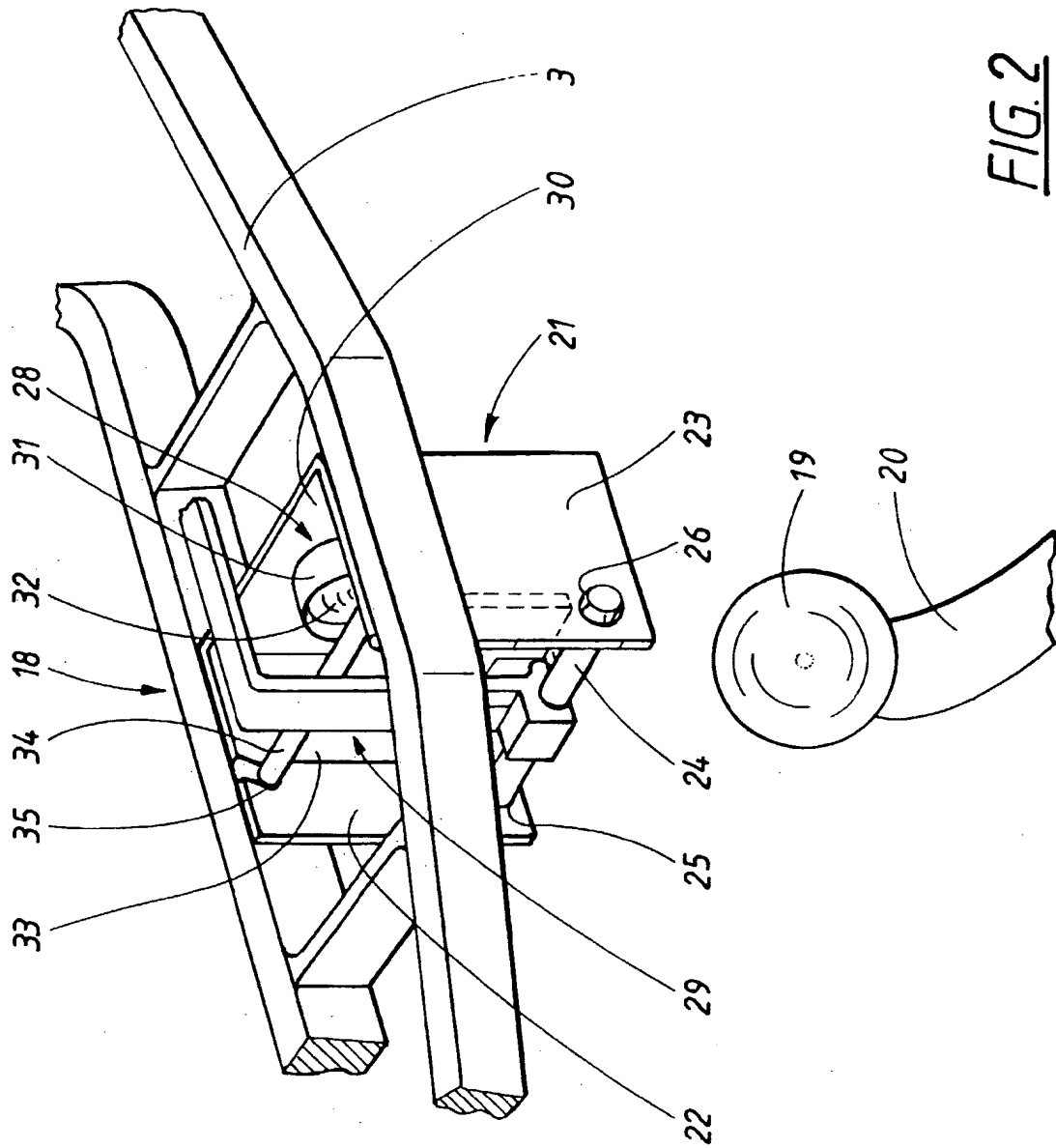


FIG. 2

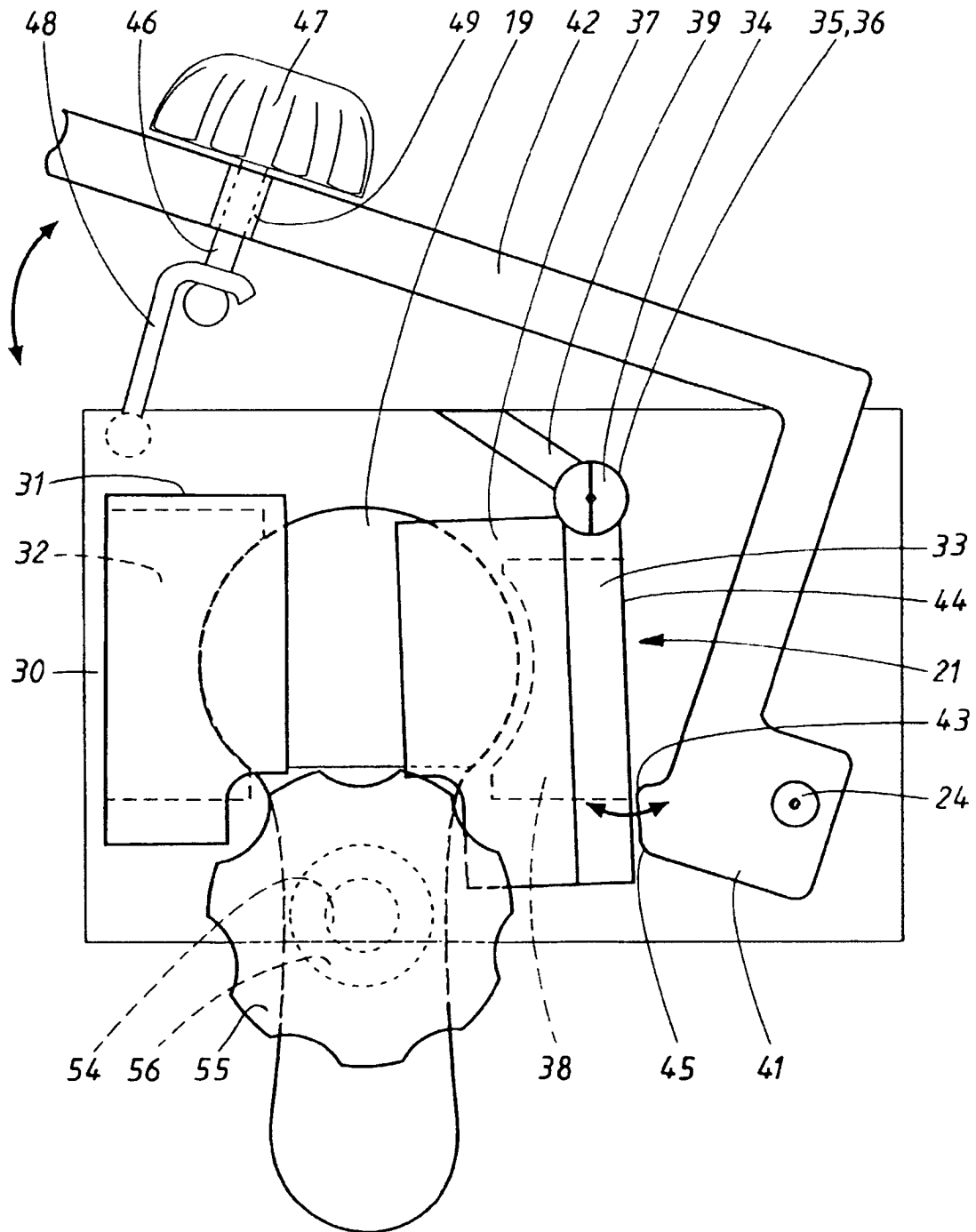


FIG. 3



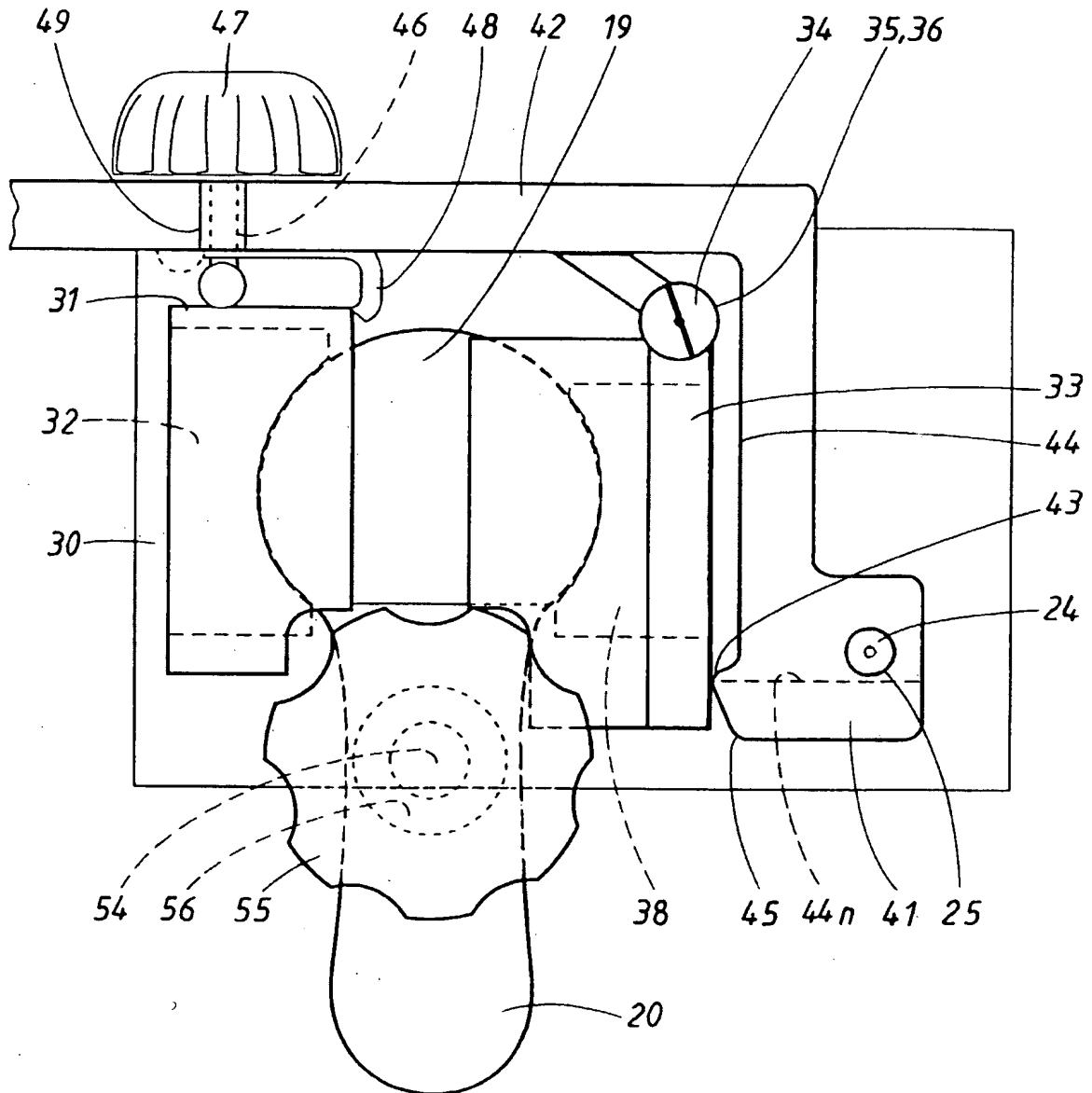


FIG. 4

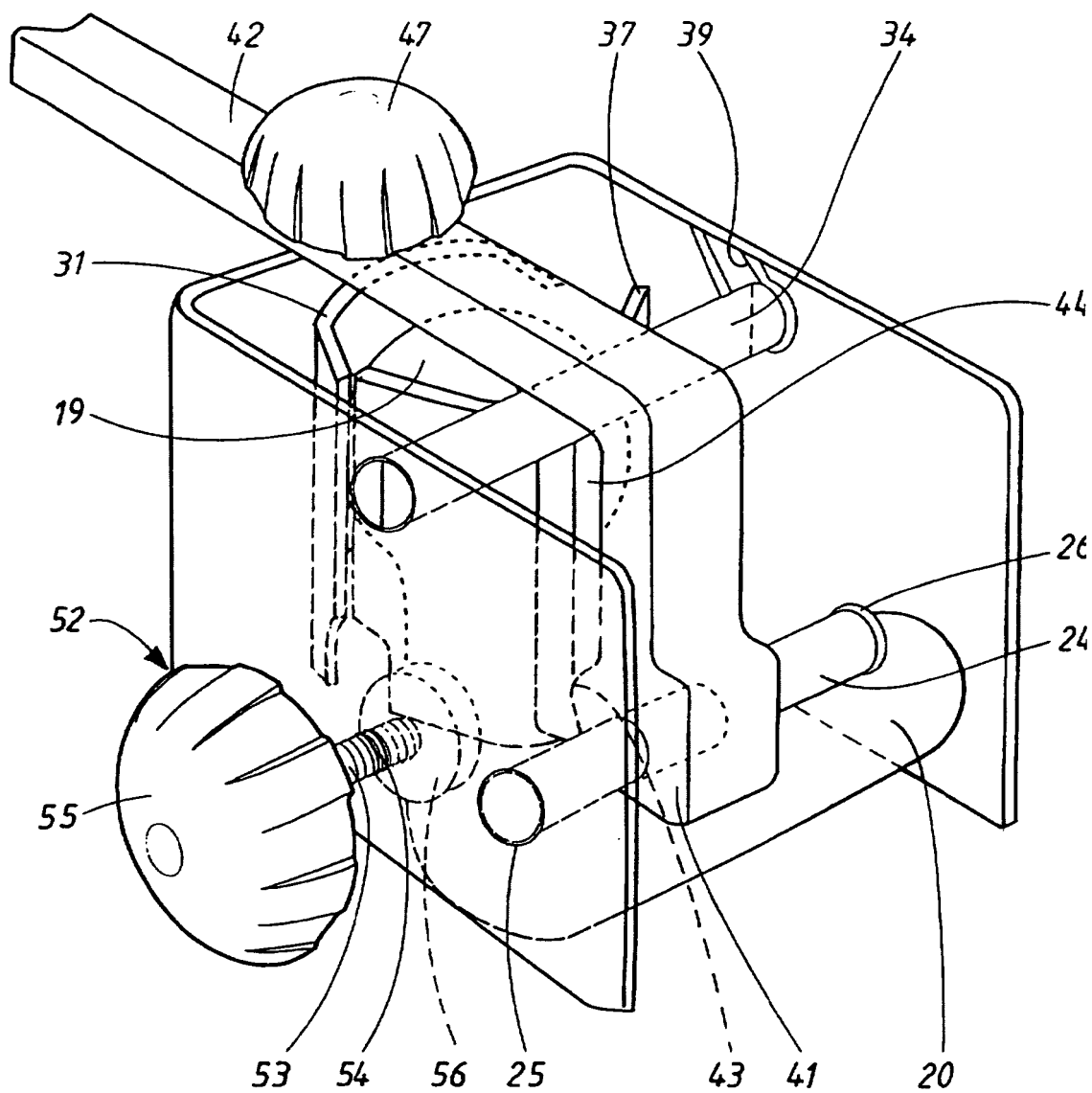


FIG. 5

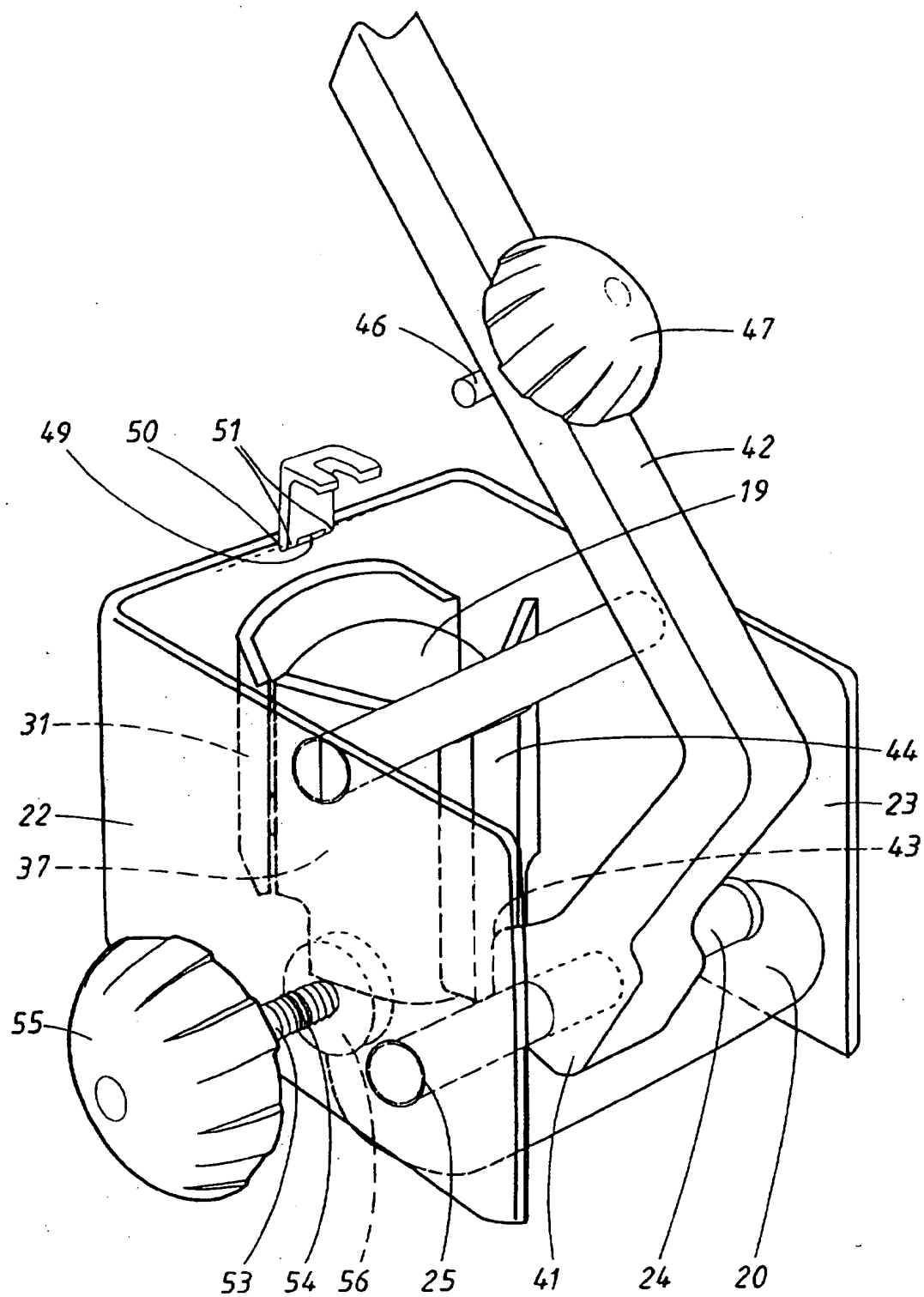


FIG. 6

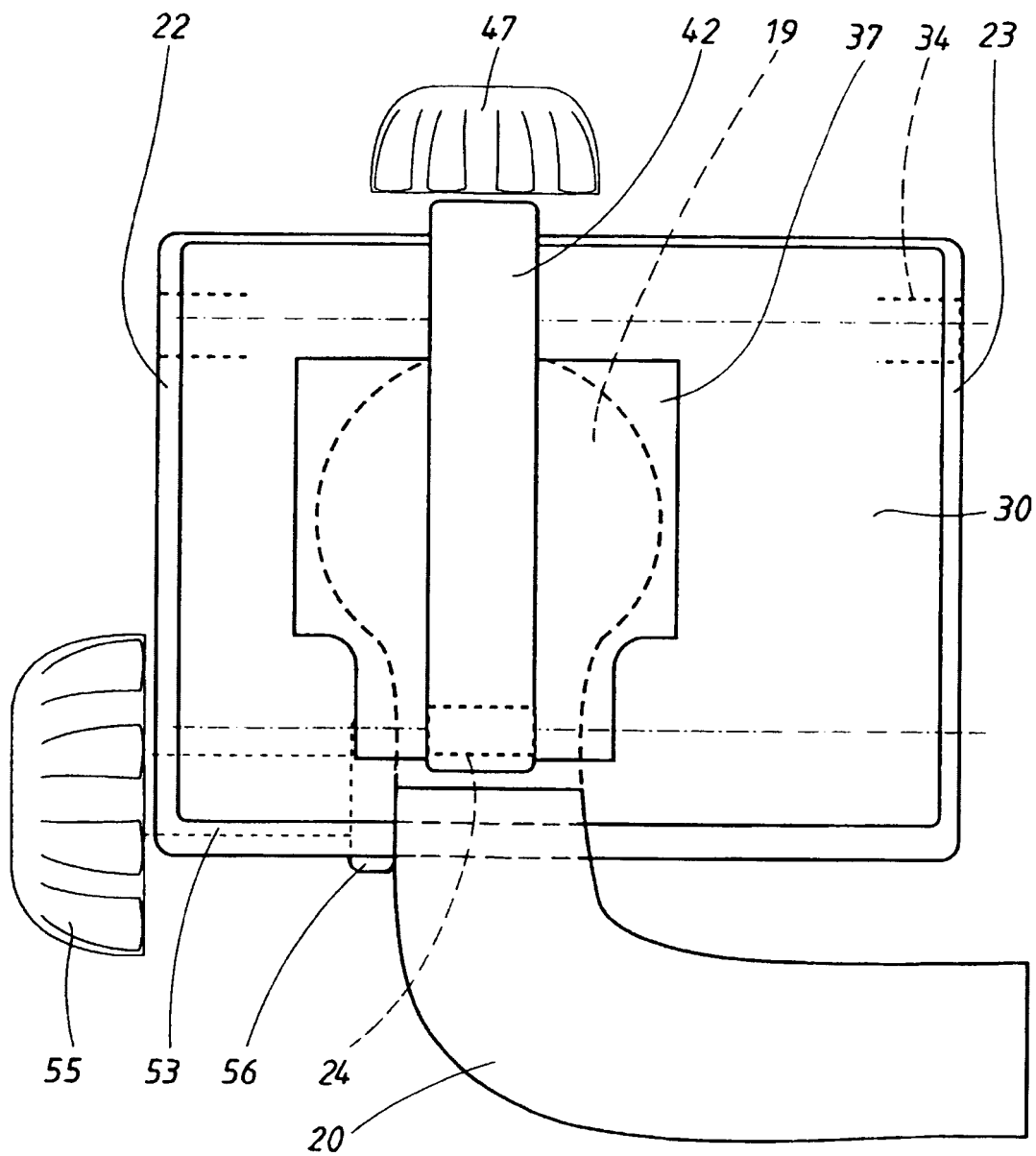


FIG. 7

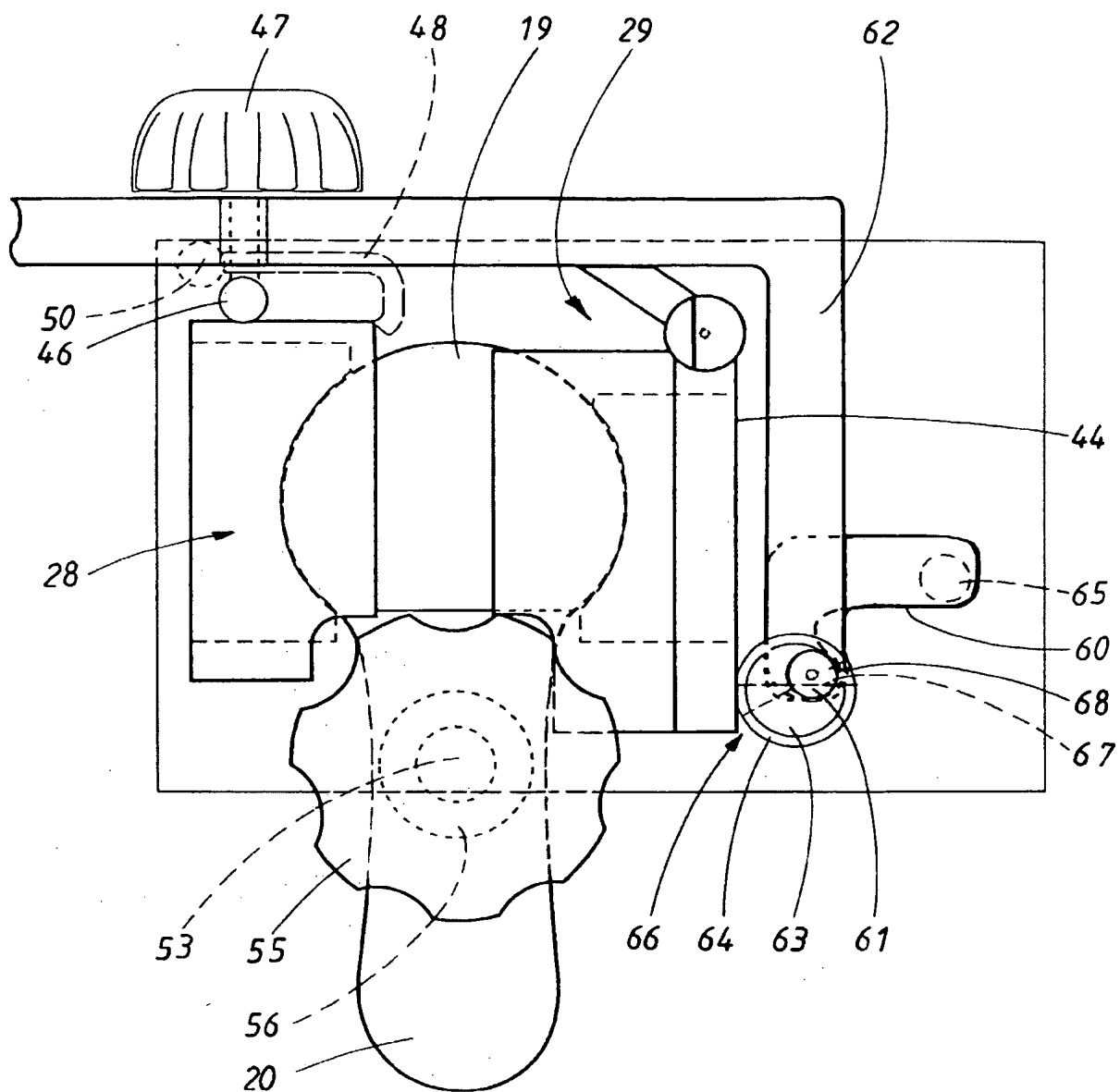


FIG. 8



European Patent  
Office

# EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number  
EP 99 85 0157

## DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
Y	EP 0 710 588 A (JOHANSSON) 8 May 1996 (1996-05-08)	1,2	B60R9/06
A	* the whole document *	6	B60R9/10
Y	DE 94 13 008 U (C+T CONFORT TECHNIC) 6 October 1994 (1994-10-06)	1,2	
	* the whole document *		
A	WO 98 09841 A (NOSK HYDRO) 12 March 1998 (1998-03-12)		
A	WO 93 04895 A (THULE) 18 March 1993 (1993-03-18)		
A	WO 92 12027 A (PALMEN) 23 July 1992 (1992-07-23)		
A	DE 298 11 279 U (MFT TRANSPORT) 22 October 1998 (1998-10-22)		
A	DE 93 03 510 U (AL-KO KOBER) 14 July 1994 (1994-07-14)		TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)
A	DE 94 04 236 U (GRUTZMANN) 19 May 1994 (1994-05-19)		B60R
A	DE 197 16 670 A (ATERA) 22 October 1998 (1998-10-22)		
A	DE 30 20 367 A (KLINGER) 3 December 1981 (1981-12-03)		
A	FR 2 684 056 A (TRIAL) 28 May 1993 (1993-05-28)		
A	NL 8 402 794 A (RINZE) 1 April 1986 (1986-04-01)		
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search <b>THE HAGUE</b>		Date of completion of the search <b>25 January 2000</b>	Examiner <b>Knops, J</b>
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	
X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document			

LPOI CHM 1503 03 82 (P04U01)

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT  
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 99 85 0157

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report.  
The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on  
The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

25-01-2000

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
EP 710588	A	08-05-1996	SE 510691 C	14-06-1999
			DE 19540041 A	09-05-1996
			DE 69507114 D	18-02-1999
			DE 69507114 T	30-09-1999
			SE 9403784 A	05-05-1996
DE 9413008	U	06-10-1994	AT 381 U	25-09-1995
WO 9809841	A	12-03-1998	NO 963751 A	09-03-1998
			AU 4139497 A	26-03-1998
WO 9304895	A	18-03-1993	SE 500040 C	28-03-1994
			EP 0603306 A	29-06-1994
			SE 9102585 A	10-03-1993
WO 9212027	A	23-07-1992	NL 9002874 A	16-07-1992
			DE 69113481 D	02-11-1995
			DE 69113481 T	05-06-1996
			DK 564508 T	12-02-1996
			EP 0564508 A	13-10-1993
			US 5549230 A	27-08-1996
DE 29811279	U	22-10-1998	NONE	
DE 9303510	U	14-07-1994	AT 404455 B	25-11-1998
			AT 47994 A	15-04-1998
			NL 9400344 A	03-10-1994
DE 9404236	U	19-05-1994	NONE	
DE 19716670	A	22-10-1998	NONE	
DE 3020367	A	03-12-1981	NONE	
FR 2684056	A	28-05-1993	NONE	
NL 8402794	A	01-04-1986	NONE	

EPO FORM P0459

For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82

**THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)**